

THE PLACE OF
SHELLEY

AMONG THE ENGLISH POETS OF
HIS TIME

BY

R. PICKETT SCOTT,

KING'S COLLEGE.

*BEING THE ESSAY WHICH OBTAINED
THE MEMBERS' PRIZE, 1877*

Cambridge :
DEIGHTON, BELL, AND CO.
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THE Representatives in Parliament of the University of Cambridge formerly gave four annual Prizes of fifteen guineas each, for the best Dissertations in Latin Prose. These Prizes were established in 1752 by the Hon. Edward Finch and the Hon. Thomas Townshend, and were continued by the succeeding Members until 1870, when in lieu of four Prizes of £15. 15s. each, the Representatives of the University in Parliament desired to give annually two Prizes of £31. 10s. each, one for an English Essay on some subject connected with British History or Literature, the other for a Latin Essay, each Prize to be open for competition to all Members of the University not of sufficient standing to be created Masters of Arts or Law; and the following Regulations were confirmed by Grace of the Senate, Nov. 11, 1869.

1. That there be two yearly Prizes of £31. 10s. each, to be called THE MEMBERS' PRIZES, the one for an English Essay on some subject connected with British History or Literature, the other for a Latin Essay.

2. That each of these Prizes shall be open for competition to all Students of the University who are not of sufficient standing to be created Masters of Arts or Law, or who being Students of Medicine are not of more than seven years' standing from Matriculation; provided that no Student, who has gained either Prize, shall be eligible for another Members' Prize given for an Essay in the same language.

3. That the subject for the English Essay shall be selected and the Prize adjudged by the Vice-Chancellor and two Examiners elected by Grace of the Senate at the last Congregation in February in each year.

4. That the subject of the Latin Essay shall be selected and the Prize adjudged by the Vice-Chancellor and two Examiners elected by Grace of the Senate at the last Congregation in February in each year.

5. That the subjects both of the Latin and of the English Essay shall be given out at the end of the Lent Term, and the Essays sent in on or before the tenth day of November in each year.

6. Any Essay which the Examiners shall unanimously declare to be in their judgment worthy of being published, shall be printed at the expense of the University.

Subject for 1877:

"The place of Shelley among the English poets of his time."

THIS Essay is published in deference to the opinion of the University Examiners.

Yet the author,—admitting that his work is by no means the ripe fruit of reading and thought, but merely the result of a four months' labour of love during an enforced abstinence from sterner studies—feels that many of the opinions stated and forms of expression used herein may justly be considered crude and immature, and deems it at least expedient to commend this explanation to the indulgent remembrance of his readers.

He also feels bound to acknowledge that he has received help from many sources, particularly from the critical work of Brimley, Swinburne and Stopford Brooke.

PLAN OF ESSAY.

Introduction. To appreciate the work of Shelley, one must lay aside all prejudice.

The Revolution in English poetry at beginning of 19th century was brought about mainly by Wordsworth and Shelley.

The poets of Shelley's time reviewed separately.

Byron's work selfish, though honest—Wordsworth essentially a teacher—Shelley a prophet and bard—Coleridge of an unique imagination—Keats a seeker after beauty.

Characteristics of Shelley as a man.

His earnestness—His faith in a happy future—His enthusiasm: its effect on his work—His love of liberty and hatred of intolerance—His honesty and fearlessness—His unfairness in judging others—A summing-up.

Brief review of Shelley's early poems.

Representative Poems.

Prometheus Unbound.—Shelley's favourite idea embodied therein—His object in writing—Shelley a reformer—Inconsistency in the poem—Its supreme lyrical excellence—Its relation to *Hellas* and *Adonais*.

The Cenci.—Preceded by *Julian and Maddalo*—Its power—Compared with tragedies of Byron and Coleridge—Shelley's treatment of the horrible compared with treatment by Keats and Coleridge—Morality of this play—Character of *Cenci*—Shelley's power for satire compared with Byron's—Character of *Beatrice*.

Characteristics of Shelley as a poet.

His plagiarisms—On the element of human interest in his poems—On his obscurities—His lack of humour—His finish—His music: result obtained in disregard of conventions—Great power of smaller poems—His high place as a poet.

The poets of Shelley's time compared and contrasted.

Shelley with Wordsworth—with Byron—with Coleridge—with Keats.

Conclusion. Why Shelley's poems are not liked in old age—Shelley's religion—Result of his work.

Appendix.

On the plagiarisms and repetitions of Shelley.

CHIEF CONTRIBUTIONS TO SHELLEY LITERATURE.

1. Accounts of Shelley's life,
by Hogg, Medwin, Trelawney, De Quincey, and G. Barnett Smith.
2. *Shelley Memorials*, edited by Lady Shelley;
Relics of Shelley, edited by Richard Garnett.
3. Notes attached to editions of Shelley's works,
by Mrs Shelley, D. G. Rossetti, H. Buxton Forman.
4. Notes on the text of Shelley's poems,
by Swinburne (*Essays and Studies*);
Contemporary Review (July and August, 1877).
5. Critical Essays on Shelley's works,
by Miss Blind (*Westminster Review*, July, 1870);
by Professor Baynes (*Edinburgh Review*, April, 1871).
6. Criticisms on one or more of Shelley's poems in
Edinburgh Review (Vols. 40, 69, 90);
Quarterly Review (Vols. 26, 36, 110).

THE PLACE OF SHELLEY AMONG THE ENGLISH POETS OF HIS TIME.

“The poet hath the child’s sight in his breast,
And sees all new.”—ELIZ. BARRETT BROWNING.

HE who aspires to be a great poet, says Macaulay, must first become a little child. He must take to pieces the whole web of his mind. We would carry this statement further, and affirm that this unweaving process has to be undergone by the mind of him who aspires to appreciate a great poet. This is pre-eminently the case when the work under examination is that of the poet Shelley. No man more than he so constantly refused to accept as truths to live by the conclusions arrived at by other men, and no poet more earnestly than he sought to reach the roots which underlie the relations of man to man, of the human to the divine.

Easier for himself Shelley doubtless would have found it if he had been more readily content with the experience of other men, for if he had accepted their

gold for gold, instead of searching for it himself, he would have been spared much labour and much dirt-sifting. Easier we repeat it would have been, pleasanter it might have been for him ; he had thus been spared the necessity of his voluntary exile, he had thus become a lion in society, an oracle courted and flattered : but it would have been disastrous for us ; his crown would have been mixed with alloy which now is absent, although indeed the mark of the fire has passed upon it—that seven-times-heated fire through which he had to pass.

We have noted in Shelley a stout refusal to obtain Truth at second hand, but though the trait from which this refusal proceeds is good, when duly set off by the company of certain other characteristics, it becomes harmful when exalted to undue prominence ; for then, refusing to take on trust the old heaven or the old earth, it strikes at the root of all belief, religious and otherwise. Thus it happened with Shelley ; after losing trust in the men with whom he came in contact, he lost trust in the God whom as yet he only knew by their report ; and while thus voluntarily he divested himself, as it were, of the wings of faith, the whole of his after-life was an attempt to soar into those realms from which his own act had exiled him.

But not only was Shelley deficient in the quality of Faith, he seems utterly to have mistaken what is meant by that word. This we shall proceed to show ; and since it is not so much our desire to enunciate the opinions of the poet as to prove them by his own words, we may perhaps be excused if we use more quotations from his works than is usual ; but in such cases, as in mechanics, what is lost in speed is gained in power.

Repentance Shelley abominated as 'the dark idolatry of self' ; but Faith, as he called it, he seemed to hate

with a perfect hatred; let us learn what is the work of this virtue in the eyes of the poet.

“Fear, Hatred, Faith and Tyranny . . . spread,
Those subtle nets which snare the living and the dead.”

“Faith . . . in the heart of man,
Gives shape, voice, name to spectral horror†.”

In another passage the poet *smiles* upon ‘the grave in which were lain Fear, Faith, and Slavery.’ Then she is ranked with Custom and Hell and Melancholy, elsewhere she and Plague and Slaughter form ‘a ghastly brood,’ while in another place the poet even goes so far as to declare ‘bloody Faith’ to be ‘the foulest birth of Time.’

From these quotations it is evident, that beyond being himself void of the quality of Faith, Shelley did not truly distinguish what is represented by the term: as evidently as the word *repentance* embodied to him the idea of *remorse*, so the word *faith* was his synonym of *superstition*; but the habit of wantonly, as it would almost seem, using holy names was inherent in Shelley, and it brought its punishment. “Why do you call yourself an atheist?” said Trelawney once to him. “I used it” (the word atheist), was the answer, “to express my abhorrence of superstition. I took up the word as a knight took up a gauntlet, in defiance of injustice.” This spirit of defiance was at the same time both the cause and the result of many of his peculiarities; his feelings had been roughly handled by the world, and although he knew there was further rough treatment in store for him if he retaliated, he yet spoke out defiantly, “You have ill-treated me, and I in my turn will handle roughly the names you hold so dear.”

† This couplet is found in Mr Buxton Forman’s note to Stanza 18 of Canto IX of *Laon and Cythna*. It is part of one of the alterations which transformed that poem into the milder (!) *Revolt of Islam*.

used them all to secure his object, but in vain. Society aided him, a great world applauded, but he had at last wearily to proclaim his want of success; the subtle essence he was seeking had escaped from his crucible, leaving nothing but ashes behind. There is something very humiliating to see a great intellect, such as Byron's undoubtedly was, flung away in the pursuit of so paltry an object, yet there is something very moving in the fearlessness and the honesty with which he displays the ill success of his endeavours. Over this is thrown the sparkle of a style rich in vigour, wit and enthusiasm, and glad with the consciousness of power, catching 'at every turn the colours of the sun.' Despite his rank, his power, and his wit, the fruit he gathered was at best but Dead Sea fruit: it could never satisfy the hungry soul.

The poems of Wordsworth proceed from an experience totally opposite to that of Lord Byron. He, too, was conscious of genius, but he regarded it as a precious deposit of great responsibility to be treasured up with peculiar care. "The poet is a teacher," said he; "I wish to be considered as a teacher, or as nothing." It is therefore to his teaching that we must look for his power. It was reserved for him first "to unfold the glory and the beauty of the material world," and to exalt the imagination to a high place among the faculties. He first showed in what way great Nature teaches those who are willing diligently to learn of her, and how exceeding great is the reward of calm and repose which she bestows upon her true children. He also, more than any poet, has aided to draw together the rich and the poor, not by idly declaiming against the pride of the one and exalting the virtues of the other, but by enlarging upon the sympathies common to both classes and bringing both together on the basis of a common manhood.

He of whom we have especially to speak was a representative poet in more respects than one. "Let me acknowledge," he wrote in the preface to the greatest of his works, "that I have a passion for reforming the world;" and while we note that this passion was his great political characteristic, we should note also that under pressure of existing evil clear-sighted politicians are apt to separate in two parties: the one sees the ills which must attend the setting straight of wrong, and shrinks from the sight; the other looks beyond the tempest to the rainbow of promise ahead. To the latter class belonged Percy Shelley. To this was he called by the "divine ordination of facts," for this was he anointed by the holy oil of suffering: "most men," he says himself—

"Are cradled into poetry by wrong,
They learn in suffering what they teach in song."

"Whether this be the best or most useful training for the poet," writes George Brimley, "may well be doubted, but it is quite indubitable that such discipline will soonest open a man's eyes to the evils of existing institutions, and the vices of old societies; and will lend to his invectives that passion which raises them above satire, to his schemes that enthusiasm which redeems them from being crotchets; will turn his abstract abhorrence of oppression into hatred against the oppressors—his loathing of corruption into a withering scorn and contempt for tyrants and their tools, the knaves and hypocrites who use holy names and noble offices to promote their selfish ends, and to fetter and enslave their brother men." Thus it was with Shelley: injustice towards himself only served to awaken in him a bitter hostility to religion and society, and to encircle with a noble halo the head of him who should inaugurate a new social and

religious era. Further than this, with a passionate longing he yearned after truth in its purity, after a Being who should absorb his nature into its own, after a personal living unity in all things. Thus his name has become the rallying-word of those who would constitute society on a new basis—who exclaim with him

“The world is weary of the past,
Oh! might it die or rest at last,”

and look forward to the coming ‘world’s great age,’ to the return of the golden years, and to a reign more bright and good than that of Saturn and of Love.

“Thus,” continues the critic, “Shelley united in himself many of the mightiest tendencies of his age—its democratic, its sceptical, its pantheistic, its socialistic spirit: yet, after the passions and the theories which supplied him with the subject matter of his poems have died away and become mere matters of history, there will still remain a song, such as mortal man never sung before, of inarticulate rapture and of freezing pain—of a blinding light of truth and a dazzling weight of glory, translated into English speech, as coloured as a painted window, as suggestive, as penetrating, as intense as music.”

There remain two poets besides those we have already mentioned, who, although not representative poets in the broadest sense of the term, yet nobly shared in the great revolution of their art, and were each unrivalled in certain branches of their craft. We refer to, and shall proceed to consider the work of, Coleridge and Keats.

The poems of Coleridge are the transcript of a singular mind, of a vast original genius. Possibly he helped to teach men to think, but his teaching is not the rare thing about him: what he *was* is the thing to be considered—a poet whose like we shall never see again.

Few poets have done so little good work as he in so long a life, but none have done better where he has done well. His best poems are simply peerless and unique—perfectly finished and exquisitely beautiful. But they are beautiful rather with a natural than with a sculptured beauty; they bear on them no mark of hammer or chisel,—thus have they grown, not thus have they been carved. Events of the day had once a vast and absorbing interest for Coleridge, but the results of the French Revolution gave a death-blow to all his hopes and threw his energies back upon himself. He had been willing to believe that this movement would restore the lost age of gold to the earth, but it served at best to erect a golden image with thighs of brass and feet of clay, disappointing thereby so bitterly the great soul of the poet, that he turned away from the harsh realities of life and sought refuge in a sweet land of dreams. So passing wonderful and peopled with such brilliant fantasies was this land, that no mortal has set eye on such visions before, nor will any ascend into such rapturous realms of imagination again. Here is this poet's throne, and here he has no rival.

The poems of John Keats are those of a man confessedly alien to all things beyond the range of his art. "I have not one opinion," he declares, "upon anything except matters of taste." It is, therefore, to his influence on poetry that we should look for the record of his life-work, and here the record is neither obscure nor scanty. To be a poet, as we have intimated, was the object of his life, and he had in him the stuff without which no great poet is made. As Byron sought pleasure, Keats sought beauty, and his was the more successful search; so much so that he is justly regarded as the founder of that which is called the literary school of English poetry.

Unlike Shelley, whose whole being was stirred at the vision of present injustice and future equity, Keats left the things of the present to take care of themselves, that he might cull in the fields of the past such flowers as pleased him. The beauty of such garlands as he wove, and described with the loving enthusiasm of an artist for his art, has served to fill men with that which they did not possess before—a love of beauty for its own sake. This result was skilfully and delicately expressed by Shelley in two lines, where in his mourning for Keats he declares that now—

“He is a portion of the loveliness
Which once he made more lovely.”

It seems strange when we consider the immense pile of Shelley literature already existing, to have to say that no completely satisfactory life of the poet has yet been written; but it is so†. Those who have attempted a full account of his life have either lacked power for the work or understanding of the task before them: Medwin is shamefully inaccurate; Hogg is doubtful as to which is the more important person—the poet or himself. Then, again, accounts of short periods of a life are nearly always unsatisfying; otherwise Trelawney's *Recollections* is worthy of a high place in one's estimation. Nor is this difference surprising; Hogg and Medwin lived too

† We feel almost disposed to recall this sentence when we look upon an addition to Shelley literature even later than Mr Buxton Forman's—namely “a critical biography” of Shelley, by George Barnett Smith, a book in which the story of Shelley's life is told with much sympathy, power and acumen. It errs somewhat perhaps, as the *Contemporary* (Nov. 1877) points out, on the side of anathematizing the poet's enemies, and makes too little of Shelley's want of humour, but otherwise it is an excellent book,—compact, clear and just.

near Shelley, being unobservant men, to appreciate his genius; by Medwin, Shelley was always remembered as a genial fellow-yachtsman; by Hogg as joint-editor with him of *St Irvyne* and author of *Zastrozzi*; but Trelawney sought the acquaintance of Shelley because he looked upon him as already a great poet despite the glorious fame of Byron and the laureate wreath of Southey. The *Shelley Memorials* are disjointed, but they afford ample proof that while Lady Shelley lives there is no need to seek further for a competent biographer. It is no intention of ours to occupy space in putting down the facts of the poet's life; these are known by every school-boy: the broad lines of the portrait are familiar enough, it is the delicate shading that is yet needed. It is doubly unfortunate that such a life yet remains to be written, because a due understanding of it is more necessary with this poet than with almost any other; for from one end to the other of his work, from *Queen Mab* to *The Triumph of Life*, there breathes an intense personality. Who can doubt, for instance, that in *Alastor*, in *Rosalind and Helen*, in *The Triumph of Life*, the poet is referring to himself and to the circumstances of his lot, unconsciously perhaps, but unmistakably. We are not quite convinced that in the spectacle of Prometheus unjustly bound and ill-treated, Shelley has entirely lost sight of the stupid and harsh persecutions he himself underwent. But this intense personality, far from being a defect, is indeed that which gives its great power to his impassioned language. Had it not been for this intensity of feeling, this white heat of indignation, the whole fabric of his verse would have given way under the weight of ornament which he has been pleased to lay upon it. It would even then have seemed a very Field of the Cloth of Gold, but now it is a field on which

the jewelled sword can do good work, and the sparkling helm is seen foremost in the fray.

The characteristic which runs through the whole of Shelley's work like a thread of gold in a tissue of silver, is his belief in the ultimate perfection of men, joined to an enthusiasm corresponding to this high ideal. He claimed for *Laon and Cythna* that which he might have claimed for most of his work, namely that it was produced by a series of thoughts which filled his mind with unbounded and sustained enthusiasm, and was written 'with the same feeling, as real, though not so prophetic, as the communications of a dying man.' Thus the words *bard* and *inspiration*, which sound so coldly applied to other men, when ascribed to Shelley have a peculiar appropriateness and truth. If ever a man gave himself up to his work, heart and soul, seeming to live only in it and for it, Shelley was the man; a more genuine and unforced inspiration it was impossible for any poet to possess; like the *vates* of old, the divine breath seemed to come upon him, to take him out of himself, and to give his utterance the authority of an oracle. When in this rapt frame of mind, he committed his thoughts to paper with the utmost rapidity. *Laon and Cythna*—a poem half as long as the *Æneid*—occupied little more than six months in the composition. The *Witch of Atlas* was completed in three days; his beautiful translation of the *Symposium* in ten mornings; while he declares that he only expended a few days on *Peter Bell the Third*, and characterises *Hellas* as 'a mere improvise.' Although he wrote thus rapidly, yet he corrected as he went; but if he could not think of a word, he left a blank and went on; if a verse would not finish smoothly he let it go—nothing stopped him in his onward sweep. Thus when the MSS. had to be deciphered it was frequently found such

a difficult task that only an intense love for the poet and a deep conviction of the worth of his least word has been sufficiently inspiring for the work.

Mr Trelawney thus describes the original MS. draft of *Lines to a Lady with a Guitar*,—"It was a frightful scrawl, words smeared out with his finger, and one upon the other, over and over in tiers, and all run together in most admired disorder; it might have been taken for a sketch of a marsh overgrown with bulrushes, and the blots for wild ducks." And that this description is applicable to many other MSS. is evident, when we know that that of *Hellas*, for example, has on the average ten lines effaced for one retained. Besides these drawbacks to a correct text of the poet there were others hardly less important: some of the poems were printed in alien Italy; many more in England with the task of revision delegated to friends; while others did not see the light till after that 'heart of hearts' had been laid under the violets and daisies he loved so well in the little Protestant cemetery at Rome. "His text," writes Swinburne, "is already matter for debate and comment, as though he were a classic newly unearthed. Certain passages begin to be famous as crucial subjects for emendation, and the master singer of our modern poets shares with his own masters and models the least enviable proof of fame—that given by corrupt readings and diverse commentaries." Owing to the inspiration with which Shelley wrote, if once he laid aside a poem he was not easily prevailed upon to finish it. His wife, indeed, persuaded him to complete *Rosalind and Helen*, and it is one of the least satisfactory of his poems. Yet it is only fair to notice, on the other hand, how exquisitely he has rounded off the *Lines written among the Euganean Hills*, which had been laid aside unfinished.

This affords incontestible proof that it was possible for even the most elevated moods of inspiration to be repeated for him; and when we consider that the fourth act of *Prometheus Unbound*, with its exquisite antiphonal music, was an afterthought, we are almost led to acknowledge that sometimes the second inspiration of a bard is more exalted than his first.

We have spoken of one of Shelley's great characteristics, and of the way in which it affects his composition, but there are others which affect the web and woof of his poetry. "I knew Shelley more intimately than any man," writes Hogg, "but I never could discern in him any more than two fixed principles. The first was a strong, irrepressible love of liberty; the second was an equally ardent love of toleration of all opinions, but more especially of religious opinions." These are the characteristics to which Shelley owes much of his persecution in the past and much of his idolatry in the present time. Undoubtedly Shelley was a democrat at heart—all his works testify thereto—and wheresoever the principles of democracy flourish, there is the ground cleared for a temple to our poet: because of this trait which Wordsworth and he at first seemed to possess in common, it is interesting to note the effect of the French Revolution upon each of them. Wordsworth looked for a rosewater revolution, and his dream of universal happiness vanished at the Reign of Terror. Shelley, gentle and sensitive as he was, did not sicken at the sight of blood as his more robust brother-poet did, but looking forward into the great Hereafter, he welcomed the knife of the pruner for the sake of the good fruit to come. The other characteristic was not perhaps as deeply stamped in his work as the first, but his speech at Dublin, and the pamphlet which he issued to the Irish

people, owe much of their worth to its prominence therein. Perhaps if we were to substitute *hatred of intolerance* for Hogg's *love of toleration*, we should be nearer the truth, for this indeed is the key-note of *Queen Mab*, and the principal discord in *Laon and Cythna*.

But beside Shelley's high faith in a golden future and his ardent love of liberty, he had other characteristics as a man and as a poet which should not be overlooked. He was, as his life and his works witness, exceptionally honest and fearless: like his own Alastor, he walked 'obedient to the light within his soul,' and, like him, he asked not whither he was going. Of Shelley it was indeed true that "the child is father of the man," for in him the qualities we have mentioned showed forth even while he was a schoolboy at Eton, and being there persuaded that the fagging system was a wrong one, he nobly stood by his convictions and their consequences. These traits grew with his growth, and their prominence at a later period of his life was the cause of his expulsion from Oxford and the hatred of that complacent set of men who think that their country has no abuses to remedy so long as they themselves hold some snug sinecure, who love conventionalities more than truth, and hate a contemner of customs more than a breaker of laws.

But after having noticed the earnestness, the fearlessness, and the honesty which are so prominent in all his works, it is somewhat startling to have to declare that there is to be found in him an unfairness in judging others, amounting almost to an absolute incapacity to appreciate the quality of honesty in any of his opponents. Yet so it was. "He utterly abhorred the Tories and Priests, from whom he differed," writes an Edinburgh reviewer, "and seems to be screaming with

rage whenever he talks of them." This trait is even to be discovered in that noble poem of *Prometheus Unbound*, for Shelley makes Jove guilty of the meanness of whining to Demogorgon:—

"Oh,
That thou wouldst make mine enemy my judge,
Even where he hangs, seared by my long revenge,
On Caucasus! he would not doom me thus."

If this is the strength of a god in defeat, we may well ask who could for a moment be guilty of belief in such a being. But enough of this; his earnestness and honesty constitute the edifice of his work; the faults we have noted are only to be found in little chinks and corners.

Thus, then, we may accept the summing-up of our poet by his latest biographer:—"Imperfect as the rest of humanity, and yet waging ceaselessly the conflict with evil, the Eternal voice which speaks to all—but to many fruitlessly and in vain—thrilled him to the very springs of his being. His soul was one with all things: it embraced the outcast of the world, and the children of light; the grandeur and minutiae of the material universe; the majestic creations of mythology; and the human Prometheus struggling with woe and wrong. He was the sweet singer of his age, destined to live in the reverent affection of all succeeding ages; for out of the burning depths of his soul sprang immortal music in praise of love, beauty, and virtue."

Having now touched upon the distinctive characteristics of the several poets of Shelley's time, and having enlarged on those of our poet, we next propose to marshal and briefly review his poems in their due order, with special notice of such as occupy prominent position

as the masterpieces by which his place in English literature must be determined. Then having shown Shelley standing by himself, we will proceed to consider him as one of a group, and to indicate his relations with its other members.

Before we do this we shall, however, pause to notice one of the latest contributions to Shelley literature. We hail with rejoicing a really critical edition of the works of the poet, for we are speaking far within the mark when we declare that the edition of Mr Buxton Forman marks a new era in the study of Shelley. It is immeasurably the best edition of the poet that has yet appeared. The poet's slightest word has been treated with an almost religious care, and while such obvious mistakes as 'one line' for 'on a line' in the penultimate stanza of *Laon and Cythna* are corrected, the text otherwise is as nearly exact to the original as could by any possibility be attained, and it is upon this text that our comments are based.

We are glad to see that in Mr Forman's edition the poem *Laon and Cythna* is reinstated in the place of the poem usually known as the *Revolt of Islam*†. It is true

† A critic in the *Athenæum* (29th Sept. 1877), speaking of this feature of Mr Buxton Forman's work, regrets "that so excellent an edition should have been so *unnecessarily* ruined." Though finding no fault with the *Revolt of Islam*, he stigmatizes *Laon and Cythna* as "the favourite quarry of...prurient garbage seekers." We do not hesitate to affirm that this is too sweeping a condemnation, especially when we consider that the changes which transform one poem into the other (each, as we have said, half as long as the *Æneid*) affect only fifty-five lines, while the incest portion, condemned by the critic, affects only *eleven* lines. However, we are not disposed to champion this change by reason of the insignificant space it occupies, and we quite agree with the critic, that an abominable principle is advocated; moreover, his hatred of the crime of incest is not more deep-rooted than ours, but we praise Mr Buxton Forman because he has dared

that the differences are few between the two poems, since they include only fifty-five lines beside the title, but a principle of vital importance is involved. Shelley, unlike his custom, was persuaded to make changes in his poem to suit public opinion: he had been too outspoken against Christianity, and his friends—and publishers—persuaded him to soften his strictures and tone down his hard sayings. The result pleased neither the public nor the poet. The world was as angry with the *Revolt of Islam* as it could have been with *Laon and Cythna*, and the poet had the mortification of knowing that he had bent in vain to the breath of public opinion, and that every change in the original poem had been for the worse. This mistake he never repeated.

There are many other alterations in this edition which, unwillingly, we pass without note, but we are obliged to declare the feeling little short of wonder, with which we have seen one mystery after another made plain by the touch of this wizard; and they who, in the case of Shelley's poems, have made confusion worse confounded by intricate commentaries on an exquisitely-woven text, will have to go further afield. Mr Forman has demonstrated method where confusion seemed to reign, and has shown clear light where all seemed mist and obscurity.

We will now glance at *Queen Mab*, which besides the value it has for us in its poetry, is additionally interesting from a biographical point of view. The mark of genius in this poem is as undoubted as the sweep of

to show us Shelley as he was, with all his imperfections as well as all his excellences on his head, and though we lament the manifestation of this morbid element of Shelley's intellect, we cannot conceive that that edition could be a true transcript of the poet's mind which should carefully omit *Laon and Cythna*.

denunciation is powerful, but it was written in an evil hour for the fame of the poet. At that point of his existence, when the world seemed to him full of darkness and cruel habitations, his piercing cry went up into the night, causing those who heard it to shudder at the acute pain it witnessed. "It is true," writes Mr Barnett Smith, "that Shelley was 'cradled into poetry by wrong,' and some notes of his divine music have been marred in consequence; naturally, his voice should not have been given to wailing; he was fitted to be one of the most competent utterers and interpreters of the great harmonies of the universe." But his first poem is discordant with pain; it is the cry of an imprisoned bird, dashing itself against the bars of its cage.

The poet had been harshly treated by men professing Christianity; his tenderest feelings had been cruelly outraged; and, unable to find by the deeds of these professors the merciful God whom by their words they claimed, he came to the hasty, bitter conclusion that there was no God. It is very touching to think of the reforms which the young poet set out to accomplish, unaided and undaunted. At seventeen, he contemplated a novel, which was to give the death-blow to intolerance; at nineteen, his *Necessity of Atheism* was to convert the world to this delightful conviction; while his *Laon and Cythna* was written at twenty-two, to undermine the three-headed monster, marriage, religion and monarchy, and topple him to the ground. But though the world went its way unreformed, failure did not long dishearten Shelley. "Amid a cloud of detractions rude" he worked on bravely, his hopefulness never quite deserting him: but there were times of despondency, even for him, and it was in one of these that *Alastor* was written. The gloom of despair darkens the whole of this sad and

solemn poem; a gloom contrasting so strangely with Shelley's usual bright work as to have been prettily compared to "the shadow caused by the sun of hope itself." The descriptive passages in this poem show an undoubted increase of power since the writing of *Queen Mab*.

The next great poem to *Alastor* is *Laon and Cythna*. Here, indeed, is the hand of a great master of melody; the music of versification, the felicity of expression, the beauty of images, which Shelley displays probably more than any other poet, are here seen in all their perfection. As yet, however, melodious as is the poet's work, it is devoid of harmony, that quality which regulates the due prominence of all the parts, and the due worth of every detail. As yet it is not the edifice of a master builder that we are examining, but rather a palace of Arabian Nights' architecture abounding in intricate passages and peopled with impossible figures. We object to the theory on which the framework of the poem is hinged, namely, that evil and bloodshed are the necessary results of a religious creed and a monarchical government, but we cannot deny the beauty with which this theory is enunciated; we deny, too, that men and women are ever waiting to offer themselves as martyrs for abstract liberty, but no one can ignore the beauty of the passage in which the poet controverts our heresy.

"'Tis said that

One by one, that night, young maidens came,
Beauteous and calm, like shapes of living stone
Clothed in the light of dreams, and by the flame
Which shrank as overgorged they laid them down,
And sung a low sweet song, of which alone
One word was heard, and that was Liberty;
And that some kissed their marble feet, with moan
Like love, and died, and then that they did die
With happy smiles, which sunk in white tranquillity."

We now turn to *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley's lyrical masterpiece, which, as such, we propose to examine somewhat minutely. The framework of the poem is mainly the same as that employed by Æschylus in his *Prometheus Vinctus*. It is in fact a Greek drama in the English language—not that any Greek dramatist could have hoped to escape the punishment due to impiety if he had been the author of the work, but because the descriptions and the feelings, the beauty and the power of this wondrous creation are essentially and altogether Greek. Yet there is another aspect of this poem which should not be overlooked, and that is the strong Hebrew phase of feeling which is seen in the first two acts of the play. Mrs Shelley tells us that the poet meditated a drama, if he had lived, on the Book of Job. The frame of mind in which *Prometheus Unbound* was written, was eminently the same which would love to dwell upon the questions of ethics and the metaphysical reasoning of the Book of Job. Job, on his dunghill, buffeted by Satan, is, in all essentials, as Froude points out, the exact counterpart of Prometheus chained to the rock, suffering unrelaxing torture at the hand of an all-powerful, merciless Jove. Each holds fast his integrity as a possession out of reach of the tormentor, and no effort of cruel enemy, or of false friend, is able to snatch it from either. Further, each believes with all his heart and soul, with all his mind and strength, that the just thing must at last conquer, that virtue must in the end be triumphant, though the reckoning be sternly delayed and ages roll between it and the present. But when we probe to arrive at the cause of this belief in each, we perceive an important difference. Prometheus endures in knowing that Fate brings justice, and that Fate cannot be escaped even by Olympian Jove. Job endures knowing that his God, who

loves righteousness and hates iniquity, is All-Just, All-Patient—Almighty.

Despite, however, its Greek dress and its seeming unreality, we regard *Prometheus Unbound* as second only—if, indeed, second—to *Paradise Lost*. Milton's grand epic is undoubtedly superior in its subtle delineation of individual character, in its delicate colouring of individual sketches, and in its carefully wrought contrast of light and shade, but whereas Milton clothed in sublime and majestic verse ideas already in vogue, Shelley gives a body to those 'shapes that haunt thought's wildernesses,' till we are almost disposed to believe that his creations are in truth

"Forms more real than living man,
Nurslings of immortality!"

In his preface to the poem Shelley has made many references to *Paradise Lost*: it is our intention, therefore, to note some further points of comparison and contrast between the two poems.

The object with which Milton wrote his epic was, he tells us, "to justify the ways of God to man." Shelley's object—we are not led away by the antithesis—seems rather to have been to justify the ways of man in his own eyes. Shelley asks, in his preface, that this opportunity may be conceded him to acknowledge that he has 'a passion for reforming the world;' we concede it willingly, but at the same time, we feel bound to declare that those reformers are rare who possess both the positive and negative principles of reform. The negative principle, as Froude defines it, is that which sternly refuses to believe in lies, or to conceal or disguise disbelief of the same. The positive principle is that which recognises the truth underlying all religion—that obedience

to law is the supremest freedom. The negative principle is the first step ; the positive, the second ; the positive when attained brings, indeed, love and praise, but to reach this the negative has to be passed, which can rarely be done without peril and reproach. The first step shows the power of a Gog or a Magog, the second of an Amphion or an Orpheus. Our poet made one brave step, and, we believe, would have successfully made the second, but the deep claimed him in the midst of his work, and the blue waters of the Mediterranean closed over his head.

The reform that Shelley would seem to urge in *Prometheus Unbound* is the abolition of the ruler of the universe.

“The tyranny of heaven none may retain,
Or reassume, or hold, succeeding thee:”

is the cheerful assurance with which Demogorgon addresses Jove, and the poet his readers. Is there then, indeed, to be no God? we would ask: but the poet leaves us in an uncertainty which we shall do well to examine.

In Act II. Scene 4, Asia and Panthea are learning of Demogorgon.

Dem. Ask what thou would'st know.

Asia. What canst thou tell?

Dem. All things thou dar'st demand.

Asia. Who made the living world?

Dem. God.

Asia. Who made all that it contains? Thought, passion, reason, will,
imagination?

Dem. God: Almighty God,

Asia. And who made terror, madness, crime, remorse? And Hell,
. . . . or the sharp fear of Hell?

Dem. He reigns.

Asia. Utter his name: a world pining in pain asks but his name:
curses shall drag him down.

Dem. He reigns.

From this extract, and the tenor of the scene from which it is taken, it seems evident that the God who made the world and thought and imagination is not the same God as he who made terror, madness, Hell, or the fear of Hell. In the case of such a distinction, the former is expressly declared Almighty by Demogorgon, who knows all things, while the latter, whom Demogorgon identifies with Jove a few lines further on in this same scene, is expressly declared *not* Almighty by Prometheus, who, at the opening of the play, when chained to the rock, thus addresses him:—

“Scorn and despair,—these are mine empire,
More glorious far than that which thou surveyest
From thine unenvied throne, O mighty God!
Almighty, *had I deigned to share the shame*
Of thine ill tyranny, and hung not here,
Nailed to this wall of eagle-baffling mountain.”

Further, if this distinction be drawn between Jove and Almighty God, it is not doubtful who the latter deity is in the mind of the poet. “What would it avail,” says Demogorgon to Asia,

“To bid speak,
Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Change? To these
All things are subject but eternal Love.”

From this we may fairly conclude that the God who does indeed rule the universe is no despot ‘holding the tyranny of heaven,’ but a merciful and beneficent ruler, whose name, whose attribute, whose power is Love. If however it be assumed that Jove and Almighty God are one and the same person, the poet is guilty of an inconsistency amounting to an undoubted contradiction of

terms, on which contradiction the whole action of the play rests. If Jove is Almighty, how can another exist mightier than he? The thing is absurd. If it be answered that according to the Greek mythology the eternal *Moîpa* was superior to Jove, we would ask if, by the same authority, Love is superior to the eternal *Moîpa*? The origin of this confusion it is not difficult to discover: Shelley wished to patch together his own aspirations after an ideal God with an improved system of Greek mythology, but, like a new piece of cloth sewn on an old garment, the new takes away from the old, and the rent is made worse.

The excellences of this grand drama are not to be lightly summed up and straightway dismissed. But we are safe in saying that it has surpassing excellences, both literary and from an ethical point of view. In the first aspect we especially note that which distinguishes Shelley above all the poets of his day—transcendent lyrical power. Here we recognise most unmistakably that lyrical exaltation in which self-consciousness is lost in the poet's contemplation of his object. Harmonious in composition and melodious in diction, this drama is like an echo of 'deep music of the rolling world.' Here, at last, we perceive the hand of a master of his art; here, too, we discover the one note which harmonises every other—the note of Love.

As Byron's *Childe Harold* may be said to be the shout of a strong man rejoicing in his strength, so Shelley's poem may be said to be the glad pæan of one who suddenly discovers the true secret of all harmony, and who pours forth his very soul in song. Of the poem—

"Every pause is filled with under-notes,
Clear, silver, icy, keen, awakening tones
Which pierce the sense and live within the soul."

Ethically, too, this poem is worthy of the highest praise: the sublime aspirations, the lofty patience of the characters accord with the majestic verse, to which the poet's own words may well apply:—

“Those wise and lovely songs
Of Fate, and Chance, and God, and Chaos old,
And Love, and the chained Titan's woful doom,
And how he shall be loosed, and make
The earth one brotherhood.”

Mr Rossetti would not “foolishly laud, nor (still less) undervalue” the fact that this poem expresses “the most modern of conceptions—the utmost reach of speculation of a mind which burst up all crusts of custom and prescription like a volcano,” and images forth “a future wherein man should be indeed the autocrat and renovated renovator of his planet.” For our part, we are not quite content to accept this interpretation of the scope of the poem. It certainly was not created of ‘dust from many a creed outworn,’ but that it images forth man as the irresponsible ruler of the world we deny. The poet does not exchange a bad rule for an anarchy; he overcomes evil to exalt love, and to this power even man is subject. Love rules all things, and with ‘perpetual Orphic song’ harmonises and orders the whole of the universe.

We had intended to point out the contrast between the characters of Shelley's Prometheus and Milton's Satan—the undying hope in the one, the sheer force of will in the other; the long-suffering love of the one, the active malignity of the other; how one opposes the reigning power of Evil, the other the omnipotence of Good. We had intended to point out the qualities they had in common—an iron will, an unflinching purpose, an endless power of suffering; but we have already dwelt

long enough on this poem, and must pass to Shelley's other work.

The poem of *Hellas*, which for convenience we examine next in order, is founded on the *Persæ* of Æschylus. "Common fame is the only authority which I can allege," writes the poet in his preface, "for the details which form the basis of the poem, and I must trespass upon the forgiveness of my readers for the display of newspaper erudition to which I have been reduced." Despite the frailty of the structure, the poem is a solid and beautiful piece of work, and a poem much weaker would stand well if upheld by such power of enthusiasm and music as that which Shelley throws into this drama. Some of the lyrics of this play are unrivalled in the English language for life and beauty and supple strength. We may especially note the grand chorus which closes the poem, where the bard assuming the robe and the majesty of a prophet, foretells a new world's great age and the coming of the golden years; while perhaps the most glorious semichorus of all is that which thus hymns the coming of Christ and the power of His suffering:—

“ A power from the unknown God,
A Promethean conqueror came;
Like a triumphal path He trod
The thorns of death and shame.
A mortal shape to Him
Was like the vapour dim
Which the orient planet animates with light;
Hell, Sin, and Slavery came,
Like bloodhounds mild and tame,
Nor preyed, until their Lord had taken flight.
The moon of Mahomet
Arose, and it shall set:
While blazoned as on heaven's immortal noon
The cross leads generations on.”

But beautiful as the lyrics of *Hellas* undoubtedly are, this poem as certainly derives its chief interest from the light it sheds upon the progress of Shelley's conceptions concerning the rule of the universe. This play and *Adonais* were nearly the last of his great works, and they perfectly agree in this important particular, that the more the mind of Shelley matured, the grander became his ideal conceptions. "The spirit of *Queen Mab*," writes Miss Blind, "is Necessity, and is addressed as such; the spirit of *Adonais* is Love, and is addressed as such. By so much higher as the idea of love is than the idea of necessity, by so much better as the poetry of *Adonais* is than the poetry of *Queen Mab*, by so much higher and better are Shelley's last thoughts than his first. There is another noteworthy distinction. In *Queen Mab* the operation of the spirit is limited to the visible universe: it is immanent there: it is expressly said to be 'contained' by Nature. In *Adonais*, on the other hand, it *contains* Nature; it not merely pervades but invests the universe—it is not only immanent but also transcendent—'sustains it from beneath and kindles it above.'" In *Prometheus Unbound* is depicted, as we attempted to show, the struggle which dethroned Necessity and enthroned Love: that play, indeed, begins with the reign of Necessity and ends with that of Love. *Adonais* and *Hellas* mark no such divided rule: above and below, within and around, Love is all in all.

X

"Life may change, but it may fly not;
 Hope may vanish, but can die not;
 Truth be veiled, but still it burneth;
 Love repulsed—but it returneth."

If such was the progress of Shelley's mind that in eleven years he passed from Necessity to Love, perhaps it may not be idle to surmise that if he had had other

eleven years allotted him he might have accepted the faith which once he reviled, and have willingly bent the knee to Him who alone could fully satisfy the holy hunger, the eager longing for love which monopolised the poet's soul.

We have purposely left unnoticed until now the poem of *Julian and Maddalo*, which preceded *Prometheus Unbound*, that we might note the trait which it has in common with the *Cenci*, the next work we propose to discuss. All the other productions of the poet come under the head of *subjective* poems; in all, the poet's personality can easily be discerned: they proceed in fact from certain perceptions within him entirely his own: the poems we are now examining differ from the foregoing, they are *objective* poems; they touch upon matters in which, as it were, the heart of the poet is not necessarily bound up: here he is an indifferent observer—there he was an impassioned actor; here he is a calm judge—there an earnest pleader. Thus these poems place Shelley before us under a different aspect from that in which his other productions reveal him; we see what he might have been, had circumstances developed in him the qualities which rather make an impartial judge than a powerful advocate. In both the poems we are considering Shelley has shown a force of genius as great as it is rare. *Julian and Maddalo* marks the poet's entry into higher regions of art; and this masculine, clear and forcible poem bears no uncertain promise of a great future in store for its author when freed from every thorn of pain and from every root of bitterness. Wonderful as it is that the same mind which created *Prometheus Unbound* should shadow forth the tragedy of the *Cenci*, it would have been more wonderful still if the tragedy had not been preceded by such a poem as *Julian*

and *Maddalo*, for that is a sturdy messenger of a greater that should come after.

We now turn to the *Cenci*, justly characterised as "the one great English play of modern times;" and before we proceed to examine it, we may note that it forms a complete refutation to those who, despite the evidence to the contrary already given by *Julian and Maddalo*, yet declare Shelley unable to handle flesh and blood. In this play the actors start up before us in the fulness of life and activity, we are in unmistakable contact with real men and women whose beings are stirred to their depths by outrage, and whose sympathies awakened mightily at the sight of suffering and wrong. Here the figures are no mere abstractions, no cold, motionless ideals, they are instinct with life and have in them the force and the freedom of nature. The course of this tragedy, more perhaps than any other, recalls the rapid action of *Macbeth*, we are carried on by it breathless till we come to the end, and then when we lay it aside the last scene is so vividly impressed on our mind that we seem to have seen with our natural eyes the scaffold and the headsman, the heart-broken Bernardo, and the kind-hearted prelate, and Lucretia and Beatrice helping one another to bind up their hair for the last time. We are sure that no careful critic can affirm that Shelley's figures are not here, at least, those of flesh and blood.

Thus we are brought face to face with a most interesting problem. Can the dramatic art come by intuition? Naturally, the answer would be an unqualified negative; for this art seems to need for its perfection a close observation of men and of causes: it seems to need a knowledge of the world, an experience of the feelings and an appreciation of the motives which sway mankind. These

are undoubtedly present with a master of every branch of the dramatic art, but tragedy is only one branch, and in this statement lies the true solution of our problem. Tragedy more or less represents an idealised existence; the violence of the passions aroused lifts the actors out of themselves, and the unwontedness of the circumstances in which they find themselves compels them to act as their nature prompts, because the counsels of conventionality cannot here be heard. Thus then the tragic faculty might be intuitive in the case of a man of strong passions, more especially when he happened also to be a lover of the ideal and a despiser of conventionalism. Shelley was all this, and therefore it is not wonderful in our eyes that his 'attempt at a goat-song,' as he lightly calls it, should be the masterpiece it undoubtedly is. Concerning the other essential for a master-dramatist—the faculty of humour—Shelley had it not, and this want would ever have limited the scope of the dramas he might write in after years. Even the sternest of men have their weaknesses, and because comedy can better paint these than tragedy it is necessary for the perfect delineation of real life. Shelley could skilfully touch off the glory or the infamy of a moment, but the power which could depict in a few touches the characteristics of a whole lifetime he had not.

We shall do well to note how far Shelley outsoared his contemporaries in the art of which we have been speaking. Wordsworth and Keats attempted no flight in this direction†, but Coleridge did, and so did Byron. And what was the result? Failure in both cases: Coleridge

† Unless inexorable accuracy requires us to class as attempts the two long-forgotten tragedies of which these poets were certainly guilty: viz. *The Borderers* of Wordsworth, and *Otho the Great*, which Keats wrote conjointly with his friend, Mr Brown of Highgate, Hampstead.

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mainly because he lacked passion, Byron because he could not appreciate any character but his own. The plots of Coleridge's plays are disjointed and heavy, the characters dull and lifeless. Now and then we come on such an exquisite little poem as the song of Glycine in *Zapolya*, but these give evidence rather of poetic than of dramatic power, and are almost as rare and quite as easily distinguishable as nuggets of gold on a rocky soil. The dramas of Byron are, in truth, simple monologues: they are but as masks which half display and half conceal the personality of the poet. They tire us by their obstinate recurrence, by their stubborn sameness. The only poem indeed in which Byron is able to bring together two people and furnish them with a natural dialogue is that one in which he, too, got tired of his morbid self and escaped from it into a land of unwonted liberty. It was neither given to the sweet dreamer of dreams, nor to the forceful, sneering seeker after pleasure, to unravel the tangled thread of human passion, or to weigh truly the motives of the sorely-tempted human soul; but this was reserved for the passionate imagination and the childlike heart of Percy Shelley.

Some critics have accused him of selecting the story of the *Cenci* solely on account of its horror. De Quincey on the other hand declares that Shelley found the "whole attraction of this dreadful tale in the angelic nature of Beatrice as revealed in local traditions and in the portrait of her by Guido." In our idea, neither of these criticisms is entirely true or entirely false, for though it is certain that a nature such as Beatrice's would have special claim for a soul such as Shelley's, yet it is quite certain also—this fact being amply evidenced by some of his favourite words and images—that the horrible possessed for him at times an almost irresistible fascina-

tion: both Keats and Coleridge were careful not to linger in this region of Cimmerian darkness, and Shelley's work would have been the better if he had followed their example.

This tragedy has even been denounced by one critic as "a loathsome subject loathsomely treated;" we shall examine the grounds of this accusation. The second count of it cannot, we believe, by any argument be substantiated; granted that the subject is a loathsome one, we challenge the critic to point out the work of any dramatist whatsoever wherein the matters which excite our abhorrence are more delicately touched upon. Shelley has so shrunk away from the hateful crime of Cenci, "as actually to leave it doubtful," writes De Quincey, "whether the murder were in punishment of the last outrage committed or in repulsion of a menace continually repeated." The first count of the accusation is, then, the only one which need occupy us.

We first note that Shelley and his critic choose to look upon the dramatic art from standpoints essentially different, and from thence this tragedy will ever be severally praised and condemned. The ground on which Shelley took his stand was that art is supreme; his critic's was that art devoid of morality is *not* supreme. We take our stand here with the critic.

Shelley entirely separated the ideas of art and morality, this the critic refused to do. Shelley declared that some actions are admirably adapted for poetic and dramatic purposes which are essentially immoral. These are the words in which he justified to Mrs Gisborne the introduction even of the crime of incest into poetry:—"Incest," he writes, "is, like many other incorrect things, a very poetical circumstance. It may be the excess of love or hate. It may be the defiance of everything for

the sake of another, which clothes itself in the glory of the highest heroism; or it may be that cynical rage, which, confounding the good and bad in existing opinions, breaks through them for the purpose of rioting in selfishness and antipathy." These are the arguments by which Shelley seeks to justify his practice, but the critic can imagine the glory of a higher heroism than that of a self-sacrificing lust, and turns away with disgust from a picture which, however truly, presents a human being 'rioting in selfishness and antipathy.' Shelley pleads again that his object, like that of our greatest dramatist, is "to hold the mirror up to nature," to which the critic replies that though his power would be great who could represent things as they are, adding no new beauty, and taking away no old deformity, yet his would be a depraved taste and an impure imagination who should occupy himself in describing, however minutely and to the life, the plague-spots of society, and the desperate ugliness of wicked hearts. "Granted," says the critic, "that the poetry is peerless, that the lyrics are faultless and that the dramatic art here reaches its perfection, I see in the work a moral ugliness which effectually eclipses all its artistic beauty. To me the darkness is more intense because a very source of light has been clouded over." Shelley, indeed, does not deserve so sweeping a condemnation, because he has attempted to draw a strong contrast of light and darkness in the characters of Beatrice and her father; but the fact that such darkness is willingly painted by him is enough to prove that he had not yet attained that purity of motive, that singleness of eye which can alone render the whole heart full of light and leave no corner dark.

It has been said that the figures of Beatrice and of Cenci stand out in too bold relief, compared with the

other *dramatis personæ*; but it should be remembered, that such characters would always stand out boldly in whatsoever age and under whatsoever circumstances they had been placed : nay, more,—as a matter of fact, these are the characters whose true history after more than two centuries still has power to awaken the strongest feelings of pity and of hatred in all ranks of the people, even in the great and busy city of the Seven Hills. “On my arrival at Rome”—writes Shelley—“I found that the story of the Cenci was a subject not to be mentioned in Italian society without awakening a deep and breathless interest All ranks of people knew the outlines of this history, and participated in the overwhelming interest which it seems to have the magic of exciting in the human heart. I had a copy of Guido’s picture of Beatrice, which is preserved in the Colonna Palace, and my servant instantly recognised it as the portrait of *La Cenci*.” The character of a Beatrice, of a Cenci, would always be prominent, even in an age of strong men, for both had essentially the strong will and the unswerving purpose which mark the leader of men. Surely, his profile should not be lightly sketched, before whom his children cowered as to a tyrant, and the princes of the church and the haughtiest nobles as to a demon : surely, too, the lines of her character should be touched in with no uncertain stroke who was a refuge for her stepmother and brothers, and who, beside daring to denounce her father in his own hall, when the sternest man there crept silently away, had yet the courage to compass the tyrant’s death, since by no other means could she escape his persecution.

How pitilessly clear-cut is the figure of old Cenci, boasting of his ‘strength and wealth, and pride and lust, and length of days ;’ vaunting that he has ‘no remorse

and little fear,' while the action of the play declares this to be no false estimate of himself. It is a picture of the natural man possessing all that the natural heart can desire, absolute in his good fortune, and unchecked by any scruple of conscience, believing only in a God as a means by which he shall himself be respited from hell, and by which he shall be revenged upon those he hates. Through observation of this character we notice in Shelley a capacity for satire of which moreover the poet himself was conscious†. Still more certain evidence of this exists in *Peter Bell the Third*,—but though our poet's faculty in this direction was sufficiently marked, yet his efforts were beyond all question immeasurably surpassed by Byron, whose *Vision of Judgment* is, perhaps, the most powerful satire the world has ever seen. The reason that Byron should excel Shelley in this branch of their craft it is not difficult to determine: in satire, Shelley's musical verse did not help him, and his earnestness was absolutely against him, whereas Byron's sneer and the grand force of his intellect were invaluable for the perfection of this weapon.

But to return to the *Cenci*. The character of Beatrice forms a noble contrast to that of her father. Her will is every whit as strong as his, yet the sweetness of her disposition is evident throughout the play, even to the last; in her prison she forgives and comforts Lucretia, who is stricken by remorse for her weakness which has brought condemnation on both, and even on the scaffold she tries to calm old Camillo by an assumption of nonchalance. Of the golden purity of her nature she is herself the

† With this statement compare Shelley's own words in a letter dated 25th January, 1822:—"I began once a satire upon satire, which I meant to be very severe: it was full of small knives, in the use of which practice would soon have made me perfect."

unconscious exponent: she discovers at once the alloy in Orsino:

“You have a sly, equivocating vein
That suits me not,”

and it is a very natural touch by which the poet contrasts her behaviour under torture and condemnation with Lucretia's: the one with her high spirit defying her gaolers, but breaking down completely for a moment when death is made certain, the other timidly fearing torture but not death.

Though the lines of contrast are not cut deeply enough between the wicked outspoken Cenci and the hypocritical priest, willing to take fees both from God and the devil, yet that is a delicate touch by which the blazoning abroad of sins by the one renders blacker if possible the damnable casuistry of the other seeking to incite and justify the crime of parricide.

“Mark, how wisest God
Draws to one point the threads of a just doom,
So sanctifying it: what you devise
Is, as it were, accomplished.”

And Shelley gives us the key to the whole character of this master of wordy fence in indicating the mode of reasoning by which he satisfies and deceives his own heart:—

“I'll do
As little mischief as I can: that thought
Shall fee the accuser conscience.”

It yet remains for us to notice how skilfully like and yet unlike are the lesser spirits to one another. The wavering, chicken-hearted Giacomo—the kind but nerveless Camillo—the loving but timid Lucretia—all serve to set off one another and to contrast with the greater light and the greater darkness which Beatrice and Cenci represent.

Before we leave the *Cenci* we feel it necessary to point out to what a vast extent the habit of plagiarism has crept into the text of Shelley's work, and more particularly (as a writer in the *Cornhill* points out) into this tragedy; but as this matter should properly be discussed in detail, and as such treatment would here be out of place, we must be content to point out a few of the many instances we have noted, and to declare our belief that a careful examination would reveal the existence of the same trait in other poets to a far greater extent than is commonly supposed. But be this as it may, having noted this habit in our poet, meet it is that we should set it down. De Quincey, remarking on the same trait in Coleridge, says, "To take a phrase or an inspiring line from the great fathers of poetry, even though no marks of quotation should be added, carries with it no charge of plagiarism. Milton [for example] is justly presumed to be as familiar to the ear as nature to the eye, and to steal from him is as impossible as to appropriate or sequester to a private use 'some bright particular star.'" This is quite enough to justify the use without quotation marks of such a phrase as "open-eyed conspiracy," which occurs in Shelley's fragment, entitled *Charles I.*, evidently borrowed from the *Tempest* (though curiously enough the phrase "too deep for tears" from Wordsworth's famous Ode is punctiliously acknowledged in *Alastor*), but it is a deeper question than this that we have to discuss, and moreover a most interesting one from a psychological point of view. De Quincey speaks of conscious plagiarism which calls for blame. We have before us the subject of unconscious plagiarism which cannot be blamed, however much its presence may be deprecated. It is not merely "a phrase or an inspiring line" that Shelley so often borrows from other poets, it

is more frequently the idea or the form, or an intricate combination of both. Thus who will say that the following passage from *Queen Mab* is not "rather a barefaced expansion of a famous line in Gray's *Elegy*"?

"How many a rustic Milton has past by
 'Stifling the speechless longing of his heart,
 In unremitting drudgery and care."

But Shelley's poem is full of such. Professor Baynes has noted them from Pope, Gray, Akenside, Collins and Thomson, and we also have marked others from Young and Shakspeare.

But this trait was developed in earlier work even than *Queen Mab*. A song in *St Irvyne* has the following two lines taken bodily from Byron's *Hours of Idleness*.

"Ah! why do darkening shades conceal
 The hour when man must cease to be?"
 (*Poem*, entitled "I would I were a careless child.")

And it survived to the last, as is evident from his latest works; for in *Hellas* besides the passage (765-785) in which Ahasuerus expounds to Mahmud the non-existence of matter, which recalls certain phrases from the *Merchant of Venice* and the *Tempest*, we have in the two lines—

"Kings are like stars—they rise and set, they have
 The worship of the world but no repose," (195-6)

an almost exact reproduction of Bacon's words from his essay on *Empire*:—"Princes are like to heavenly bodieswhich have much veneration but no rest."

We have ourselves noted the following plagiarisms from *Comus* which evidence in Shelley a peculiar love for that delightful poem; a poem which to him never lost its loveliness or its music, as the beautiful echo we find in his work gives witness.

Thus when in *Laon and Cythna* describing a covetous man deprived of that which he holds most precious, Shelley says that—

“He walks in lonely gloom beneath the noonday sun,”

who is not reminded of the passage in *Comus* which thus expresses the same idea ?

“He that hides a dark soul, and foul thoughts,
Benighted walks under the midday sun;
Himself is his own dungeon.”

Again, in the last act of *Prometheus Unbound*, we find a chorus of spirits singing—

“Our spoil is won,
Our task is done,
We are free to dive, or soar, or run;
Beyond and around
Or within the bound
Which clips the world with darkness round.”

And who will not here discover an echo of the rejoicing epilogue of the spirit at the end of *Comus* where his song is—

“But now my task is smoothly done,
I can fly, or I can run
Quickly to the green earth's end,
Where the bow'd welkin slow doth bend;
And from thence can soar as soon
To the corners of the moon.”

But doubtless a more striking resemblance to a passage in *Comus* than even the foregoing is to be found in Shelley's *Song of a Spirit*, which begins thus:—

“Within the silent centre of the earth
My mansion is; where I live ensphered
From the beginning, and around my sleep
Have woven all the wondrous imagery
Of this dim spot which mortals call the world.”

At the beginning of Milton's poem "the attendant spirit descends or enters," and sings thus—

"Before the starry threshold of Jove's court
My mansion is, where those immortal shapes
Of bright ærial spirits live inspher'd
In regions mild of calm and serene air;
Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot,
Which men call Earth."

That one poet could borrow from another the form of expression of a whole passage, the situation, the peculiar agent, two unusual words, an epithet and a whole phrase without acknowledging or even being conscious of his obligation, may seem almost incredible, yet no less than this has Shelley done in the case before us.

It might be interesting to carry this question further, but it would be here unprofitable, yet we may record our belief that a well-read and gifted critic might be able, by following the traces afforded by Shelley's unconscious use of borrowed words and phrases and ideas in his longer poems, to infer pretty accurately what had been the poet's study before or during the progress of his work. Thus the words and expressions in *Laon and Cythna* point more particularly to the study of Spenser and Milton; *Prometheus* to the study of the Bible (especially of the New Testament); the *Cenci* to Shakspeare; while throughout it is evident that *Macbeth* and *Comus*, and the *Ancient Mariner*, were favourite reading with our poet.

One often repeated objection to Shelley's poems is that they are devoid of human interest. This notion may recommend itself indeed to the "general reader," with his superficial judgment and his skin-deep enthusiasm, but to the true Shelley-student it is a misconception the more deserving of censure, because it has in it

some show of truth. The defect with which we are most likely to credit Shelley at the beginning of our reading is indeed that of unreality, we cannot grasp his abstractions, the unbodied joy eludes us,—but soon this feeling passes off, we learn to soar away into the blue deep with the poet, and we become aware that although Shelley may not be able to present to our view the elemental body of things, yet he is able to show the subtle essences of them to those who have the grace of heavenly vision. The forms which Byron presents to us are tangible enough, for they are himself—of the earth, earthy; but Shelley's are intangible to the careless reader because they are ethereal, they are elusive because of their spirituality. If then enthusiasm and purity are devoid of interest to human beings, the charge against the poet may be considered proven, otherwise it is an infamous allegation to be scornfully laid aside.

But though we may thus dismiss one charge, there are others beside his well-known inordinate repetition which cannot be so satisfactorily disposed of. Of these the greatest, perhaps, is that his meaning is frequently very obscure, and in nowise “to be understood of the common people.” This is sometimes due to the careless and prodigal way with which he throws one image upon another into his composition: the principal thought is thus often entirely hidden from sight, and the meaning is lost by the numerous ramifications of secondary thoughts which the poet pursues time after time. It is no justification of this to say that it was the natural result of the poet's love for metaphysical subtleties and remote analogies. Obscurity is not a mark of power but of weakness: if a man has something clear in his own mind it is quite certain that he can express the same clearly in words. But sometimes the obscurity we com-

It is our Scholarly critic is getting on.

plain of is of a deeper and more conscious kind. Even the most beautiful—nay we would rather say, *particularly* the most beautiful—of his poems are in parts so obscure as almost to defy the efforts of the most loyal of Shelley-lovers to overmaster them and pluck out the heart of their mystery. To take a simple case, we may declare that the beautiful stanzas, beginning “Away, the moor is dark beneath the moon,” have little meaning to an ordinary reader, and even Swinburne is bound to declare of *Epipsychidion*, that “the high, sweet, mystic doctrine of this poem is apprehensible enough to all who look into it with purged eyes and listen with purged ears; but the passages in which the special experience of the writer is thrust forward under the mask and muffler of allegoric rhapsody are not in any proper sense mysterious; they are simply puzzling; and art should not have anything to do with puzzles.” Yet this poem, Swinburne goes on to say, despite this fault holds a foremost place in Shelley’s work by reason of “the depth and exaltation of its dominant idea, by the rapture of the music and the glory of the colour which clothe with sound and splendour the subtle and luminous body of its thought, by the harmony of its most passionate notes, and the humanity of its most god-like raptures.”

A defect in Shelley’s poetry, to which we have already alluded, is his entire lack of humour; for that is not humour which is to be found in the single ghastly joke in the *Cenci*†, or that play on the words in

† *Judge*.

You, young lord,

Linger not here!

Beatrice. O tear him not away!

Judge. Guards, do your duty.

Ber. (*Embracing Beatrice*). Oh! would ye divide body from soul?

Officer. That is the headsman’s business.—(*Cenci* v. 3).

Prometheus† so feeble that we hope it will resolve itself into an unintentional cacophony left in by oversight; neither here is it to be found nor in his satires; we do not laugh over Shelley's satires as over Thackeray's and grow better in consequence, it is but a grim smile at best that is called forth; we mark the hit of an earnest man turned cynic—the more cynical for having been the more earnest—and we wince at the malice of the blow. Shelley's is not that pleasing satire which touches lightly the follies and the foibles of men, but that biting sarcasm which evidences that (for a time at least) the milk of human kindness in the writer has turned to gall while he looks on at the world with the glance of a Heraclitus. Sometimes the same hand may be able to paint in the styles of a Rembrandt and a Wilkie, but such men are as rare as a Shakspeare, and Shelley was not one of them‡.

Not merely such faults as these, but his very excellences will prevent Shelley from ever becoming a popular poet, his poems will probably always be "caviare to the general," for it demands something more than a casual

† The unseasonable seasons.

(*Prometheus Unbound*, II. 4.)

‡ "Perhaps, when all is said and done, the position of Shelley in the history of literature will be determined by his utter deficiency on the side of *humour*. No poet so finely gifted in other respects was ever so forlornly unconscious of the humour, but, above all, of the humorous pathos, of human life. The deficiency makes him a dreary poet to readers of Shakspearean quiddity. His flights of wild ecstasy, his bursts of delirious music, his triumph of melodious falsetto, will ever make him unique among singers. His noble enthusiasm for humanity, his splendid philosophical insight (when he was calm enough to use it), will ever make him venerable among reformers and social teachers. But there was little variety, and no tender mirth, in the legacy he has left to the world,—and for this, among other reasons, his music has never quickened the public pulse on any great human occasion."—(*Contemporary*, Nov. 1877.)

reading, it requires diligent study to appreciate and a cultivated taste to enjoy the subtleties of his thought and the beauty of his figures, and this can only be expected from the "fit audience, though few," for which Wordsworth asked.

Among the many artistic excellences of Shelley's work we may note the exquisite finishing touch he puts to his poems; the last stone, as it were, seems to compact and complete the edifice, the last strain is one of exquisite melody. For a proof of this we may point to the last verses of *Prometheus Unbound*, of *Hellas*, of the *Hymn of Apollo*, and of others too numerous to mention. In this respect Shelley's work affords a wonderful contrast to that of Byron, who so frequently ends discordantly or ineffectively. That excellence, however, of Shelley's poems which is most easily seen, and which has been most readily acknowledged, is the golden music of his verse, and this crowning beauty glances in the sunlight of his enthusiasm like "the countless dimplings of the waves of the deep." Yet this result, curiously enough, is obtained often in direct opposition to the generally received canons of criticism. Mr Rossetti notes with astonishment Shelley's "seeming indifference to mere correctness of rhyming structure," and even Mr Buxton Forman is not ready to grant to others the license to follow Shelley's example of being so frequently content with an echo rather than a rhyme. The usage however, as Mr Forman remarks, is to be found in Dante and in common continental custom, and Shelley's practice has been successfully followed in the present day by Swinburne. Thus it would seem well if some of the canons of such a payment-by-result people as we are should be altered or at least modified; perhaps however they are better left untouched, since genius will ever

make its own laws, and formulas will no more fetter a Shelley than a Rossini.

We have but little space left us to note smaller poems, but that we shall now proceed to do. Despite that *Adonais* is modelled on the work of Moschus and Bion, and contains many resemblances thereto, it is a singularly powerful and beautiful poem; what Shelley says of Moore is here true of himself, that

“Love taught grief to fall like music from his tongue.”

It is one of the most beautiful elegies in the English language: *Lycidas* and it sit on the elegiac throne robed in equal majesty. But who shall justly praise the ærial witchery, the glittering tissue of the *Witch of Atlas*, or of the soul-stirring odes *To Liberty* and *To Naples*. There is a subtle imponderability in the first, a weight of majesty in the two latter, which it is impossible to duly calculate, but each after its own kind is perfect. Then, too, in what other poet can we find such grand liquid melodies as those of the *Hymn of Apollo*, or such soft metrical sighings as we find in *Lines written in dejection near Naples*, or such delicate music as in that poem of *The Sensitive Plant*? and in what words shall we speak of that high *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, in which the poet declares that the spells of this sweet spirit bind him to the grand ideal—

“To fear himself, and love all human kind”?

And what shall raise us to the due appreciation of that state of exalted feeling into which the poet was rapt in his odes *To a Skylark* and *To the West Wind*? In each of these the personality of the poet seems to fall off from him like a loose robe, and his whole soul has rapturously entered the object of his contemplation. The

poet is lost from our sight like the lark in the blue deep, and we only hear the bird's trill of happiness and triumph as it pours its full heart

"In profuse strains of unpremeditated art."

In the second ode the music is deeper, and seems to hold a deeper meaning; this is no mere rapture, no simple joyance, it has rather the tone of a mighty organ rolling forth a grand fugue of love and hope. Here is present in all its beauty the deep longing to do good, and the only true might of earnestness.

But despite his earnestness, Shelley's work cannot become rugged or unmusical. Nay, rather, because of its earnestness, it is neither one nor the other; in this Shelley is to Browning what Ruskin is to Carlyle, both men with a God-given message, the latter rugged by reason of his earnestness, the former musical, because he simply cannot be otherwise, and often most musical when most earnest. The best lyric work is either imaginative or passionate: of the latter quality Coleridge was utterly devoid, yet, as we have seen, the imaginative part of his work was unique and peerless, placing him on a pedestal of his own, high even among the most exalted of our lyric poets; but in Shelley the two qualities were combined, and the resulting work is of transcendent strength and beauty. His work is doubtless richer in passion than in imagination, but the comparison is as profitless as a comparison between the riches of a Croesus and a Solomon.

Thus, when we consider the beauties of the lyrics mentioned above, and that matchless group printed with *Prometheus*, which, says Mr Forman, "follow the incomparable fourth act [of that drama]—still sounding in diverse echoing keys and under infinite variations of melody the same intense intellectual passion, the same

most holy love of humanity, the same godlike perception of ideal beauty," we shall not hesitate to assign Shelley the place claimed for him both by Swinburne and by his latest editor, that of England's greatest lyric poet.

We have not yet sufficiently compared and contrasted Shelley with the other representative poets of his age ; this task we shall now attempt to complete.

Each aided, as we have said, in the revolution of poetry which took place at the beginning of the century. Before this, men had looked upon nature as a machine, as a regulated, heartless engine, and man had been regarded as the only fit subject for poetry : it is true that nature was not entirely absent from the poet's ken, but she was only mentioned when in nature the poet found some reflection of man, and the machine became a mirror. But the revolution inaugurated by Cowper was perfected and set on a firm basis by the poets of the age we are considering. Wordsworth, first of them, declared that there was a living spirit in nature ; a spirit which animates all things from the "meanest flower that blows," to the glorious birth of sunshine : a spirit which circles through matter in whatsoever form, and gives to each its distinct life and being. Thus then he loved nature with a personal love. She taught him as a human teacher, truths which human teachers had yet to learn.

Shelley also found out for himself that a spirit animated nature, but while Wordsworth called this spirit Thought, Shelley called it Love, by which he tells us all strife shall be healed

"And the earth grow young again."

This is the point at which the two poets' lines of teaching diverge. Wordsworth despaired of a nation's teaching

which should not exalt the faculty of imagination, but Shelley exclaiming, with his own Prometheus,

“How fair these air-born shapes! and yet I feel
Most vain all hope but love,”

certainly seemed to have the countenance of that Apostle who declared even the understanding of all mysteries and all knowledge, and the possession of such faith as could remove mountains, to be worthless without love.

But besides this original and special feature of Shelley's poetical creed, he was not entirely sundered from the school of poetry he had succeeded. Much of his work is not distinctly the record of Nature as she is, but as she appeared in certain moods of the poet's mind. Thus, for instance, the *Lines written among the Euganean Hills* are, says Swinburne, “a rhapsody of thought and feeling coloured by contact with Nature, but not born of the contact. . . . His [Shelley's] aim is rather to render the effect of the thing than the thing itself, the soul and spirit of life rather than the living form, the growth rather than the thing grown.” The contrast pointed out in these words marks accurately the difference between Shelley and Keats. Shelley's aim was opposite to Keats', and what Keats' was we have therefore just seen.

Byron, who independently made the same discovery as Wordsworth and Shelley, belonged far more to the past school of poetry which we mentioned above than either of these two great poets. To Byron the sea in its restlessness was an emblem of his own unquiet heart—in its strength it typified the vigour of his intellect. Thus all nature became an enlarged picture of the poet's personality—its varying aspects supplying each component with some significant illustration: unquestionably the

Wordsworth - a gentleman

grandest passage he has written is a description of his co-equal, the sea, laughing to scorn the efforts of man. With Wordsworth one can indeed enjoyably explore the fields and contentedly range the country, but it is only with Byron and Shelley, as Swinburne has remarked, that one can put off from the shore and be borne far from the haunts of men into the "wide, waste places of the sea." The sea-wind blows frankly on our cheeks, and our boat scuds freely along, although indeed the sun is sometimes hidden and the deep threatens to engulf us.

These are the results which we may expect from such principles as these several poets advocated. Wordsworth's work has all the excellences and all the defects of a man of method. His facts are carefully observed and honestly studied, his generalizations just and well based, but his work is lacking in fire; it is strong, but seldom stirs to a fiery enthusiasm; it influences the imaginations and the feelings, but not the life-blood. Shelley, on the other hand, has all the excellences and defects that are the results of a well-meaning revolutionism. Many shams, it is true, are abolished, yet often these shams have gathered round holy things, and the reformer does not always discern this. But we find in Shelley, above all things, an earnestness which would go far to redeem the faults in far more deadly principles than he professed. Moreover, this earnestness never tires us; we are tired by Byron's uncontrollable propensity for acting; we cannot help gaping sometimes at Wordsworth's love for teaching pursues the even tenor of its way, but our sympathy is always with Shelley, and his earnestness rivets our attention.

We have already spoken of the comparative lyrical powers of Shelley and Coleridge. We have noted that

most who catalogue nature

the imaginative power of Coleridge was unrivalled in its own realm, but out of this, the imaginative power of Shelley was very great, and the word-painting in which Protean nature is sketched as he lay in the net which Shelley's imagination had thrown over him, is as unrivalled in its domain as even *Christabel* or *Kubla Khan* in theirs. Perhaps Shelley's greatest lyric triumph is his *Ode to the West Wind*, where rapt out of himself he passionately prays—

“Be thou, spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!
Drive my dead thoughts over the universe,
Like withered leaves, to quicken a new birth;
And, by the incantation of this verse,
Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!”

One power at least these lyrists possessed in common, that of poetic translation. The following extract is an acknowledgment of this from a writer who evidently did not very highly esteem them as original poets†:—
“In two fragments of *Faust*, especially in that of *May Day Night*, Shelley has given a splendid proof that he too, as well as Coleridge, was born to translate from the German. Their own thoughts are often not sufficiently defined. But in command of flowing and gorgeous language they are unrivalled among our modern poets, and deal with words as Rubens and Paul Veronese with drapery and colours. Let others only give them the personages and the order of the procession, there seems no limit to the folds of brodered and stately expression in which they can array them forth.”

We shall rather contrast than compare Keats with

† *History and Principles of Translation*. Hayward's translation of *Faust*. (*Edinburgh Review*, Jan. 1833.)

Shelley. They were of two distinct schools of poetry, and this explains why each was not able more easily to appreciate the poetry of the other. Shelley, as we have seen, belongs mainly to the subjective school, while Keats undoubtedly belonged to the objective: the personality of Shelley is generally to be discerned in his writings, that of Keats never. Keats and Shelley used often to discuss the problem of the relative worth of Beauty and Truth†, and the difference in their conclusions lies at the root of the differences in their poems. Thus, while Shelley admired the beautiful, and used it simply as an adornment of his poetry, Keats was entirely absorbed in it, and unconsciously made it the very essence of his. As a natural consequence of this love of the beautiful, the greatest characteristic of the work of Keats is its sensuousness, which, indeed, is only saved from degenerating into the sensual by the high idealism of the poet, but the ideal was at last so grand that it is almost impossible not to believe that if Keats had lived to the ordinary age of man he would have been one of the greatest of our poets, for on his work from first to last is the mark of progress, and that, too, in a mind promising great things from the first. "There is evidence," says

†

"'Tis the eternal law

That first in beauty should be first in might."

KEATS, *Hyperion*.

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

KEATS, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*.

"See a disenchanted nation

Spring like day from desolation;

To truth its state is dedicate."

SHELLEY, *Prometheus Unbound*.

"There is one road

To peace, and that is truth, which follow ye!"

SHELLEY, *Julian and Maddalo*.

Professor Masson, "of a progress both intellectually and morally ; of a disposition, already consciously known to himself, to move forward out of the sensuous or merely sensuous-ideal mood, into the mood of the truly epic poet, the poet of life, sublimity and action." When we compare the sublime "Titanic-torso" *Hyperion* with the faulty but promising *Endymion*, how great seems the distance measured !

It has been said that Shelley's poems are not liked in old age. If this is true, it is as surely partly our fault as it is partly his. "After all," he himself acknowledges, "I cannot but be conscious, in much of what I write, of an absence of that tranquillity which is the attribute and accompaniment of power." It may then be true that the repose so characteristic of Keats is absent in Shelley. Thus far the fault may lie with him, but too frequently we ourselves do not long enough retain that childlike belief in possibilities, that childlike all-absorbing hope which is so requisite for entering into the spirit of most of Shelley's work. Shelley's want of tranquillity doubtless proceeded from his want of "negative capability," of which Keats possessed so much,—that quality which he defined to be the capability of a man "of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." Shelley had little or no capability thitherwards, he was seemingly unable ever to suspend his judgment ; if the thing could not be proved, he held it to be disproved ; he could not rest content with twilight, he was in haste to see the sunrise. He that believeth will not make haste, says the prophet, and Shelley's want of belief is the reason at once of his haste and of the many obstacles he stumbled over in his path.

And what shall we say of Shelley's religion? for this

is a question not to be shirked. Carlyle has truly said that a man's religion is the chief fact about him, and this is supremely true of the poet who is a leader of men. But though the question is thus important, we desire to treat it in the simplest manner possible. Undoubtedly Shelley was not a Christian, for to the last he hated Christianity—looking upon it simply as the parent of such monsters as Smithfield bonfires and St Bartholomew massacres—but we must not forget that, although he denied the divinity of our Lord, he did no injustice to His 'sublime human character,' but hailed Him as a Promethean conqueror, owning, too, that 'like a triumphal path He trod the thorns of death and shame.' We have said that Shelley was not a Christian—what was he, then? We have heard enough, and too much, of Shelley's atheism. True, he assumed the title himself, but to few men could it be less truly applied. Call him materialist, deist, pantheist, if you will—atheist he was not. Why, even in *Queen Mab*, the poem by which alone the charge of atheism could be sustained, the gray rock itself is alive to Shelley, and every particle has its active living spirit.

"Every grain
Is sentient both in unity and part,
And the minutest atom comprehends
A world of loves and hatreds."

How shall we call such a belief atheism? But this charge is effectually disproved by his later works, and, in our opinion, these unmistakably reveal him as a pantheist of the higher order; one of those who painfully strive to climb

"The great world's altar stairs,
That slope through darkness up to God."

It is true that he never quite got above the darkness,

but at times he caught glimpses of the light above, and, as we have seen, he was nobly progressing; so nobly, that that higher pantheism was possible for Shelley, which acknowledges Him the fulness of whom filleth all in all.

Some have said that Shelley never could have attained this. We hold such an assertion to be both cruel and unwarranted, for even his enemies never denied his honesty and his fearlessness, and, therefore, we may justly assert that if Shelley's doubts had been honestly dispersed, he would fearlessly have proclaimed as much. His wrench, at the first, from Christianity seemed to have so warped his judgment that he could never afterwards regard dispassionately the faith he had rejected†. For our part we cannot but believe that if Shelley's honest doubts had been openly and liberally met by those with whom he first came in contact, his after-life might have been very different to that which it actually was. If Shelley, when he was writing his *Necessity of Atheism*, had then discussed matters with Coleridge, what good for him might not have ensued! For the spirit in which Shelley's doubts would have been listened to is thus embodied in Coleridge's own words: "His discussions—tending towards atheism of a certain sort—would not have

† "I grieve that I cannot call Shelley a Christian . . . yet I cannot help feeling that there was a spirit in poor Shelley's mind which might have assimilated with the Spirit of his Redeemer—nay, which I will dare to say was kindred with that Spirit, if only his Redeemer had been differently imaged to him. Let who will denounce Shelley, I will not. I will not brand with atheism the name of one whose life was one dream of enthusiastic, however impracticable, philanthropy. I will not say that a man who, by his opposition to God, means opposition to a demon to whom the name of God in his mind is appended, is an enemy of God. To such a man I only reply, You are blaspheming a devil. That is not the God I adore. You are not my enemy. Change the *name*, and I will bid that *character* defiance with you." (REV. F. W. ROBERTSON, *Lectures &c. On Sceptical Books.*)

scared *me*; for *me* it would have been a semi-transparent larva, soon to be glorified, and through which I should have seen the true image—the final metamorphosis. Besides, I have ever thought that sort of atheism the next best religion to Christianity; nor does the better faith I have learnt from Paul and John interfere with the cordial reverence I feel for Benedict Spinoza."

This is the negative side of the question; the positive has been thus summed up by the man who had better knowledge than any other of Shelley's life and beliefs: "The leading fact of Shelley's character," writes Leigh Hunt, "may be said to have been a natural piety. He was pious towards nature, towards his friends, towards the whole human race, towards the meanest insect of the forest. He did himself an injustice with the public in using the name of the Supreme Being inconsiderately. He identified it solely with the most vulgar and tyrannical notions of a god made after the worst fashion; and did not sufficiently reflect, that it was often used by a juster devotion to express a sense of the great Mover of the universe." We do not wish to further prolong this discussion, but it would not be fair to close it without alluding to the noble work that Shelley did among the poor and needy wheresoever he happened to meet them. In a biography numerous examples of this should be quoted, but here they are out of place. Yet we may declare our belief that Leigh Hunt had his friend Shelley in mind when he wrote his poem of *Abou ben Adhem*, for it is sure that he who could love, as Shelley did, the brother whom he had seen, was not very far from loving the God whom he had not seen.

To sum up, we shall do well to ask of Shelley's work the questions to which every man's work has to submit

sooner or later. What is its tendency? Has it helped any human soul? To the first we may reply with another question—What is the tendency of that which seeks by lofty images and impassioned exhortation to raise mankind above petty interests and debasing pleasures into a realm where love shall be the breath of life, animating

“All things in that sweet abode
With its own mild brotherhood”?

Nor should our second question meet with any dubious response. Shelley's work must have helped many a human soul if such can be helped by the contemplation of a fervid belief in the omnipotence of right, and an earnest conviction that the ultimate perfection and happiness of the human race are inevitable achievements of the virtue and the heroism of the good and the wise. Surely it is helpful to see a brother striving through mists and shadow with steady purpose to reach the light; surely it is helpful to hear one sorely tried declare that he does not bate a jot of heart or hope, but that he has power given him to still bear up and steer right onward, nay more—

“To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night; . . .
To love and bear; to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates.”

And with the no uncertain answer to our question on our lips, we may add in the poet's own triumphant words—

“This, like thy glory, Titan! is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, Victory!”

APPENDIX.

ON THE PLAGIARISMS AND REPETITIONS OF SHELLEY.

WE propose here to discuss some of the plagiarisms to which we have already alluded. The writer in the *Cornhill*† speaking of those in the *Cenci*, points out how closely the passage in *Othello* (v. 2), where the Moor is summing up a result which must follow the murder of Desdemona, is imitated in the *Cenci* (III. 2), where Giacomo sums up a like result which must follow the murder of his father.

Further, when we compare *Cenci*'s apostrophe to the wine he is drinking—

“Be thou the resolution of quick youth
Within my veins, and manhood's purpose stern,
And age's firm, cold, subtle villany,” (*Cenci*, I. 3)

with the following passage in *Richard III.*, (IV. 1)—

“Tetchy and wayward was thy infancy;
Thy prime of manhood daring, bold, and venturous;
Thy age confirmed, proud, subtle, sly and bloody,”

we trace a resemblance which is not so much in the words as in the idea, where indeed it is unmistakable: this remark will also apply to the resemblance of the words with which Cæsario in *Twelfth Night* (II. 4) and Beatrice in her prison (*Cenci*, v. 3)

† Some Notes on *Othello*. (*Cornhill*, Oct. 1868.)

introduce their songs: also to the resemblance in the passages *King John*, iv. 2, and *Cenci*, v. 1, which describe the means whereby a murderous intent is frequently struck home in the hearts of men.

The writer then proceeds as follows:—

“Sometimes we have in part, the exact words of the passage in Shakspeare which had impressed the modern poet’s mind, for instance Beatrice exclaims,

‘Ay, something must be done,
What yet I know not—something which shall make
The thing that I have suffered but a shadow
In the dread lightning which avenges it.’ (*Cenci*, III. 1.)

Who is not reminded of Lear’s burst of passion?

‘I will do such things—
What they are I know not, but they shall be
The terrors of the earth.’ (*Lear*, II. 4.)

In another part of the play we find Beatrice saying—

‘How fearful! To be nothing! Or to be
What? O where am I? Let me not go mad!
Sweet heaven, forgive weak thoughts.’ (*Cenci*, v. 4.)

Similarly Lear exclaims:

‘O, let me not go mad, not mad, sweet heaven!’

The coincidence here is both curious and remarkable, on account of the words ‘sweet heaven’ being in the modern play joined with the sentence following the prayer against madness, while in *Lear* they form part of the prayer. Evidently the flow and cadence had unconsciously lingered in Shelley’s ear, and so the words were reproduced by him in their sequence, though disunited in their sense. Earlier in the same speech Beatrice expressing her shuddering repugnance at the idea of approaching death, says,—

‘My God! can it be possible I have
To die so suddenly? So young to go
Under the obscure, cold, rotting, wormy ground!’

Compare with this Claudio's words on a similar occasion in *Measure for Measure* (III. 1)—

'Ay, but to die and go we know not where,
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot!'....."

Even this formidable list by no means exhausts the plagiarisms observable in the *Cenci*, for there still remain others from *Hamlet*, the *Merchant of Venice*, and the *Sonnets*.

It is the more curious that we should be able to note so many in this play, for Shelley expressly points out in his preface the only plagiarism which he had intentionally committed; and when we remember the absolute truthfulness of Shelley's nature, we cannot hesitate to believe that the plagiarisms we have noticed were entirely unconscious. But we need not long be at a loss to discover the cause of this trait being so largely developed in Shelley. He was not like Wordsworth, indifferent to every modern growth except his own poetry, but with the greatest zest used to devour—rather than study—the beauties to be found in the works of modern writers and of the great masters of old time. His object in reading was not so much to obtain knowledge as enjoyment, and he entered with so much zeal into the creations of other men, into their graces and their elegances, their actors and their situations, that they seem to have become an inseparable part of his very thought and nature. To such a heat of enthusiasm did the high thoughts of great souls raise our poet, that his thoughts became welded, as it were, to theirs, and when he wished to enunciate an opinion akin to one already famous, his own words were so inextricably mixed with the words he already loved that he was quite unconscious of any such union; and doubtless no one would have been more unfeignedly surprised than the poet himself if any of the passages we have noticed had been pointed out to him as other than original. This explanation deserves the greater consideration from the fact that Shelley's plagiarisms are mostly not from out-of-the-way passages, but from those most known and most quoted. There remains also one further reason which

may help to account for this habit; and that is the love which most men of taste exhibit for beautiful ideas and figures and images neatly expressed. Just as in every-day life a man who has a favourite idea or a pet crotchet, is sure to produce it on all possible occasions, so writers are apt to repeat again and again any phrase or epithet which has won their admiration. Thus Shelley frequently repeats in his poems his favourite ideas and figures and images; and that, moreover, is the case sometimes when their expression may occupy three or even four lines. As an example of repetition and plagiarism combined, it is sufficient to note that while in his address *To Night* he bids her—

“Blind with thine hair the eyes of day,”

and we find elsewhere the couplet—

“Pallid evening twines its beaming hair

In duskier braids around the languid eyes of day,”

(*Lines written in Lechlade Churchyard*)

that both these were evidently suggested by Macbeth's apostrophe to darkness—

“Come, seeling night

Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day.” (*Macbeth*, III. 2.)

The following are, however, better examples of the repetition of favourite ideas to which we have alluded. In *Prometheus Unbound* (III. 3) we find the following:—

“Death is the veil which those who live call life:

They sleep and it is lifted.”

In the next scene it is thus expressed:

“The painted veil, by those who were, called life,—

Which mimicked, as with colours idly spread,

All men believed and hoped,—is torn aside.”

While in the lines *To a Reviewer* we find an almost exact repetition of the foregoing:—

“Lift not the painted veil which those who live

Call life; though unreal shapes be pictured there,

And it but mimick all we would believe

With colours idly spread.”

Again, of the following passages the second is actually enfeebled by being so evident an adaptation of the first. In his ode *To Liberty*, Shelley, speaking of the Areopagus, the hill which he regards as 'Liberty's earliest throne and latest oracle,' says :

"Within the surface of time's fleeting river
The wrinkled image lies, as then it lay
Immovably unquiet, and for ever
It trembles, but it cannot pass away."

And then concerning the city of Pisa on a calm summer's evening, we read—

"Within the surface of the fleeting river
The wrinkled image of the city lay,
Immovably unquiet, and for ever
It trembles but it never fades away."

The excessive repetition of favourite images in the poems of Shelley is an undoubted blemish: we have too much for instance of 'wave-reflected stars,' of 'downward-gazing flowers,' of 'sublunar and interlunar spaces,' of 'stellar and planetary wildernesses.' These particular images are doubtless owing to Shelley's habit of spending hours gazing into the calm waters of a pool, or of dreaming away the night in contemplation of the blue vault of heaven; and perhaps the origin of most of his other favourite images could be traced: but this is certain, that such repetition evidences a certain want of poetic care and constitutes an undoubted lack of elegant finish. "The allusions that occur most frequently of all in Shelley's poetry," writes Professor Baynes, "are undoubtedly those to the art and mystery of weaving, including the whole process and its result, warp, woof, and web. The references are indeed so numerous, so habitual, so wrought into the very texture of Shelley's poetical thought and style, as almost to defy analysis and calculation. . . . Had Shelley indeed been the enchanter Merlin himself with the profoundest faith in 'the charm of woven paces and waving hands,' he could not have resorted more constantly to this peculiar spell or have given it a more

prominent place in his magical verse. His whole poetry is in fact covered with a fine net-work or web of figurative allusions to weaving."

Besides the repetition of favourite images and phrases, Shelley is very prodigal in his use of favourite and even unusual words. The number of times that the words 'anarch' and 'daedal' occur is somewhat astonishing, while other favourite words in very frequent use are 'moonstone,' 'windless,' 'nursling,' 'hyaline.' In addition to these unusual words Shelley evinces a great liking for peculiar Spenserian, Shaksperian, and Miltonic words. Thus we find in the one poem, *Laon and Cythna*, 'strook,' 'prankt,' 'eyen,' 'mowing,' 'grimacing,' 'weets,' 'glode,' 'clombe,' 'frore,' 'indight.' For our part we are inclined to believe that this points to a recent perusal of Spenser by the poet; for though several of these words appear elsewhere, scattered through his other works, they are rarely found other than singly or at most in twos or threes, while here the number of them is somewhat striking.

Professor Baynes and Mr Buxton Forman have made complete lists of Shelley's unusual words: we ourselves have observed 'foison' (plenty), 'thwart' (in sense of sour-tempered), 'quips and cranks,' 'archimage,' 'crudded' for 'curded,' 'forbid' (unprayed for, cf. *Macbeth*), 'treen' (old plural), 'port' (cf. "Their port was more than human," *Comus*), and 'grain' (in old sense of dye); and have noticed a very lax usage occurring in *Lines written among Euganean Hills* in the case of the last-mentioned word, for within a few lines it is used in its two distinct, old and new, meanings, without any note to mark the difference.

